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ABSTRACT

The Chicago Archives Branch has a sizeable amount of material pertaining to Indians who once resided in the area of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota which is contained in the records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the District Courts of the United States, the United States Attorneys and Marshals, the Chief of Engineers, and the National Archives microfilm collection. The BIA records in the Chicago Archives pertain to major administrative units of the BIA, the Great Lakes Consolidated Agency (records date from 1869 to 1952), the Menominee Agency (1865 to 1956), and the Sac and Fox Reservation at Tama, Iowa (1896 to 1947). The records of these field units consist mainly of general correspondence, financial and accounting records, and case files for individual Indians. Correspondence is classified under major headings such as "Administration and Control," "Health and Social Relations," "Education," etc. A number of the National Archives micropublications might be used directly with the textual holdings of the Chicago Archives Branch and thereby permit the researcher to examine BIA central office records in conjunction with those of a BIA field unit. (AN)

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# A RESEARCH GUIDE TO MATERIALS RELATING TO NATIVE AMERICANS AVAILABLE IN THE CHICAGO ARCHIVES BRANCH

by
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Chicago, Illinois

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The Chicago Archives Branch, which serves the states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, includes in its holdings a sizeable volume of records pertaining to Indians who resided in that area. These records are concentrated in Record Group 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, (BIA). However, Record Group 21, Records of the District Courts of the United States. Record Group 118, Records of the United States Attorneys and Marshals, and Record Group 77, Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, also contain varying amounts of information relevant to Indians and Indian policy in the Great Lakes region. A large number of National Archives microfilm publications completes the collection of records available to researchers interested in studies of Native Americans.

The policy of creating reservations for Indians was established early in the Midwest, with the Oneida Indians accepting a tribal preserve in northern Wisconsin in 1831. Since then over 15 reservations have been created in Wisconsin and Michigan.[1] Many of these reservations are small, with less than ten square miles of land and populations of less than 1000, but several are of considerable significance in terms either of the activities in which they were engaged or the volume of records which they have created.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs records in the Chicago Archives pertain to

three major administrative units of that agency. First are the records of the Great Lakes Consolidated Agency, its predecessor the La Pointe Agency, and the various subagencies and schools which at one time were independent but over which Great Lakes Consolidated now has jurisdiction. Records from this agency date from 1869 to 1952, with the bulk post-dating 1900. A second major unit is the Menominee Agency, whose records span the years 1865 to 1956. Now defunct, this agency was located at Green Bay, Keshena, and Neopit during the course of its existence. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Menominee Agency was its long-time lumbering operation, which implemented forest management practices on reservation lands to provide a steady yield from the property as well as steady revenues for the tribe.[2] The final field unit with a significant block of records on deposit in the Chicago Archives is the Sac and Fox Reservation at Tama, Iowa, whose records for the years 1896 to 1947 have been accessioned. The Tama establishment at one time maintained a tuberculosis sanatorium which received patients from tribes living all over the midwest and plains areas.

The records of these agencies consist mainly of general correspondence, financial and accounting records relevant to the administration of the unit, and case files for individual Indians. The correspondence files contain letters received and sent, copies of bulletins and circulars from other governmental entities, reports, blueprints and architectural drawings, and financial materials, all of which provide a wide range of information about both general Indian policy and the operation of the agency. The correspondence files were arranged according to a decimal classification system after December 11, 1925, which tried to categorize each piece of correspondence. The major headings under this system were "General and Statistical," "Administration and Control,"

"Finance and Accounts," "Lands," "Buildings and Building Equipment," "Supplies and Farm Stock," "Military Activities," "Health and Social Relations," "Education," and "Industries and Employment." Correspondence with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs had a special classification, and much of the policy-related correspondence appears in that category. However, cover letters and reports sent to the Indian Office were frequently filed according to topic as well. Before 1925 correspondence was maintained as "Letters Received" from various sources and as "Letters Sent," often in press copy books. In addition to questions about policy or agency operations, other topics which one might pursue through correspondence files include the agency's role in the larger community, the relationship between Indian affairs officials and the Indians in their charge, social and economic activities among the Indians, the effect of the depression and depression-era programs on the reservation, Indians during World War I and World War II, education of Indian children, health problems among the Indians, and the Indian family.[3]

The financial and accounting records of the agencies, which are exceedingly detailed in many instances, can supplement the correspondence files for many topics, particularly those regarding the economy of the reservation and the administration of the unit. Appropriations, cash and general accounts, annuities, sales, and contracts all appear in the decimal classification file under the general heading of "Finance and Accounts." Other categories in the decimal file, particularly the "Supplies and Farm Stock" heading, pertain to the administration of money at the installation. Prior to 1925 financial and accounting records were maintained separately from the general correspondence of the agency. There is very complete documentation of the operations of the Menominee Mills in these records, for example, along with accounts of timbering on many

of the other Wisconsin reservations. The correspondence, accounts, and pay rolls of the Civilian Conservation Corps' Indian Division, (CCC-ID), along with records of the Indian Relief and Rehabilitation Division of the BIA, illuminate different programs by which the Government came to the assistance of the Indians during the 1930's. Such programs included reconstruction of reservation property, soil conservation, and timber management.

From the case files which the agency maintained on individual Indians who came under its jurisdiction, one can draw a clearer picture of the lives of tribal members. The individual Indian case files incorporate correspondence between the superintendent and the Indian or between the superintendent and other agency officials concerning requests for assistance, problems encountered, and personal affairs of the Indians. School, health, and financial records were sometimes maintained in these folders, but agency clerks also created separate files to document different aspects of their wards' activities. Several other types of records, which are part of these collections, might shed light on the lives and living conditions of the Indians. There are records of studies, titled Industrial Surveys, on the economic status of tribal members, and data collected about Indians wishing to enroll as a tribe. Estate files are another source, although these only exist when wills were disputed. Indian census rolls, birth, marriage, and death certificates, and other genealogical records are additional sources of information on individual Indians. The agent submitted an annual census showing the Indian or English name, age, sex, and family relationship of the Indians in his charge. The census rolls have been microfilmed as M595, "Indian Census Rolls, 1888-1940." The Chicago Archives has either the originals or microcopies of most of the censuses taken on Wisconsin reservations between 1880 and 1940, as well as those for the Sac and Fox in Iowa.

The records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs are the major source of information in the custody of the Chicago Archives about Native Americans, but other records complement existing BIA holdings. The United States Government acted as the guardian of the Indians' interests in legal affairs, so the US Attorney frequently handled cases involving Indians. These cases included trespassing by whites on reservation lands, the right of Indians to alienate property, suits against enrolled Indians or against Indian agents, and criminal actions such as selling liquor or gambling on Indian reservations. In the correspondence files and precedent case files of the Records of the US Attorneys and Marshals (RG 118) for the District of Minnesota and the Western District of Wisconsin, there are frequent references to cases involving Indians. While not extensive, these records, in combination with the correspondence files of the agencies, provide a starting point for research into cases of legal significance to Indian communities.[4]

Opportunities for research on Indians and the law also exist in the Records of the District Courts of the United States (RG 21). The organization of Court records, by district, court type, and case type, sometimes makes topical reference difficult without exact identification numbers, but such an arrangement does not exclude aggregate studies. The data available in the Court records are no less valuable because of this difficulty in reference, and Court records are an underutilized source of social and economic information. Papers filed in most cases include the petition, answer, motions, orders, and final disposition of the case. Sometimes affidavits, transcripts of testimony, and exhibits will appear in the case files, but these are not common. Records for the Western District of Wisconsin, the Eastern District of Wisconsin, and the Western District of Michigan are peppered with actions involving Indians;

especially common are charges of sale of liquor to Indians and/or on Indian reservations.[5] Registers, dockets, and case files are fairly complete for these three districts, and there is ample material for researchers interested in the type and extent of illegal activity occurring in and around Indian reservations, criminality among Indians, and the relationship between Indian and white lawbreakers.[6] Bankruptcy records might be used in conjunction with various BIA records such as individual Indian files, CCC-ID records, and reservation surveys to compare standards of living between Indians and small wage earners in the dominant society. Further, as Indians become more litigious, records of Federal Courts will continue to be sources of significant information about Indians and their place in society.[7]

A small set of records related to Indian campaigns on the Great Plains are part of the Chicago Archives holdings of the Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers (RG 77). These concern the activities of the Corps of Engineers in mapping Indian reservations and exploring territories still controlled by Indians, as well as sketches and correspondence detailing engagements in which Corps personnel found themselves. The Corps also drew responsibility for surveying military and political conditions on some Western reservations, and reports of these projects are incorporated in the same series of records as the scouting reports.[8]

In addition to textual records, the Chicago Archives has in its custody a considerable amount of microfilm useful for research on Native Americans. Most of thes National Archives micropublications reproduce series of records from central office units, such as correspondence control registers, letters received, and copies of letters sent. Some of these publications, such as M15, "Letters

Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1824" or M271, "Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1823," contain information about Indians residing in the Great Lakes region but do not directly relate to textual records in the Chicago Archives. Other micropublications, such as M1, "Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-1851," and M842, "Records of the Minnesota Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1849-1856," pertain to tribes for whom the Archives has records dating from later years. Finally, since the Governor of each territory served as ex officio Superintendant of Indian Affairs, there is information about Indian policy in the territorial records created by these officials. Letters by the Governor and other documents on Indian policy for the territory of Wisconsin can be found in M236, "The Territorial Papers of the United States: The Territory of Wisconsin, 1836 1848, a microfilm supplement." M470, "State Department Territorial Papers: Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1801," is another publication which includes records related to Indian policy. Correspondence with military figures leading campaigns against the Indians, treaties settling the disputes, and regulations to control the Indians after the establishment of white authority appear among the other records of the territory.

A number of National Archives micropublications can be used in direct correlation with the textual holdings of the Chicago Archives Branch. In particular, M606, "Letters Sent by the Indian Division, 1849-1903," M574, "Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904," M348, "Report Books of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1838-1885," M21, "Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881," and M234, "Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881," complement the various series of BIA records in the custody of the Chicago Archives.

The two main correspondence series, "Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881" and "Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881," contain exchanges between agencies and superintendencies existent at the time, such as the Green Bay and La Pointe Agencies, and the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) in Washington. These series also have correspondence to and from the OIA and private individuals, other government officials, and individual Indians which do not appear in the field office records but which have bearing on issues documented in those files. The Office of Indian Affairs registered its communications by subject, by the name of the agency which originated or received the letter, or by the surname of the author, and sometimes used all three systems simultaneously. Letters from Indian agents in the field frequently were filed according to the author's surname rather than by the name of the agency which he supervised. Communications from individual Indians, however, were listed under the name of the tribe to which they belonged. The OIA's internal finding aid to its incoming correspondence was a system of registry books. These volumes summarized the contents of the letter and showed the file number assigned to all letters received after June, 1836. They have been reproduced as M18, "Records of the Office of Indian Affairs: Registers of Letters Received, 1824-1880." A third correspondence series, "Letters Sent by the Indian Division, 1849-1903," provides a different angle to research in Indian records. These letters, sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and others, reflect Indian policy as developed in the Office of the Secretary of the Interior. The Office of Indian Affairs then implemented this policy through its directives to its agents in the field. Communications from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs were termed "reports" by the staff at the OIA and these have been filmed as "Report Books of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1838-1885." The

"reports" generally went to the Secretary of the Interior and covered the entire range of Indian policy. These records are in chronological order until 1869, when the OIA adopted a system of arrangement by subject matter, such as "Land" or "Civilization." Some indexes to the reports are available. Because of the broad definition given to the term "report" by the OIA, not all of the missives in this series concern matters of high policy, but they do form a concentrated source of material signed by the top official in the Office of Indian Affairs. A final series of central office records of particular interest to researchers looking to supplement the textual records of the Chicago Archives is the "Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904." These consist of records, principally related to claims against Indians or investigations of Indian agents, which were maintained in a single filing system rather than in the files of the different divisions which had received the letters originally. A subject list of the "Special Files" appears in the descriptive guide to the micropublication, and a number of files deal with problems or claims involving Indians of the Great Lakes region.

The researcher may have to follow numerous leads in order to locate all correspondence relevant to a specific topic, but the micropublications available in the Chicago Archives add considerable depth to the textual records on deposit in the Branch by permitting one to examine central office records in conjunction with those of the field unit, thus making it possible to follow policy development from its origin in Washington to its implementation in the field, at least for the years prior to 1900. There are no micropublications currently completed for the years after 1900. However, the files of the field office units and records of other agencies in the custody of the Chicago Archives are themselves more complete for these years, and that should permit successful

conclusions to the many research projects which might be developed from these records.

FOOTNOTES

1. Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Great Lakes Agency," Ashland, Wisconsin, June, 1971. This mimeographed essay describes the activities, jurisdiction, and history of the Great Lakes Agency. Pages 2-5 cover the development of the various reservations now served by the Great Lakes Agency. Great Lakes inherited records from the La Pointe, Laona, Red Cliff, Mackinac, Lac du Flambeau, and Tomah Agencies, although most records created by the Mackinac Agency before 1889 are in the National Archives in Washington. Some of these have been reproduced as microfilm publication M1, "Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-1851," which are available in the Chicago Archives Branch research room.

2. The La Follette Act of 1908 authorized the expenditure of tribal funds to erect a sawmill and manufacturing plant, provided that timber was cut on a "sustained yield" basis. See also Joe Keshena, "The Menominee Indians of Wisconsin: Their History and Economic Development," Neopit, WI, 1948. The present Menominee Reservation was established in 1854.

3. Taking the specific topic of Indian education, the Chicago Archives has records of the Tomah Indian School (1908-1934), the Red Cliff School (1901-1922), the Oneida School (1897-1905), the Mt. Pleasant School (1904-1926), the Neopit Day School (1938-1946), the Lac du Flambeau Boarding School (1913-1922), the Hayward Boarding School (1904-1928), and the school of the Sac and Fox Reservation (1908-1929). Since Indian children frequently attended schools at other sites, reservation agents corresponded with educators at such places as Pipestone School in Minnesota and Haskell Institute in Kansas. The decimal classification files maintained at each field unit has education as a major subject category with over 100 different entries. Among these are attendance reports, inspectors' reports, examinations, personal record files, and correspondence related to subjects offered at the school. Micropublications of the correspondence files of the Office of Indian Affairs, described below, contain frequent letters and reports about Indian educational policy at the national level, as well as communications with other Indian schools.

4. The correlation between different record groups is evident in the case of the U.S. vs. J. S. Stearns Lumber Co., in which the U.S. contended, unsuccessfully, that Indians did not have the right to alienate lands granted to them as part of their tribal allottment. This and related cases occurred between 1898 and 1914. Correspondence about this case appears in RG 118, Western District of Wisconsin, and RG 75, Correspondence of the Superintendent of the La Pointe Agency. The case papers themselves appear as part of RG 21, US District and Circuit Courts, Western District of Wisconsin. Stearns was also a figure in the dispute between the Flambeau Lumber Co. and the Lac du Flambeau reservation over payment for services rendered to the reservation. Material regarding that incident appears in National Archives micropublication M574, "Special files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904," # 299, as well as in the above-mentioned correspondence files.

5. The question of liquor traffic among Indians appears in both US Attorneys' and BIA correspondence. BIA records include the actions of tribal courts in liquor cases (frequently filed under the category "Suppression of Liquor Traffic" in the agency decimal file) as well as the correspondence of officials responsible for the enforcement of the law.

6. The earliest case found in the Chicago Archives with Indians listed among the principals is an 1821 murder trial in the records of the Michigan territorial court. Other cases pertain to violations in Indian trade, a subject which greatly concerned Indian agents. See also micropublication M1, "Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-1851."

7. Recent legal research in Chicago on Indians has concerned the enrollment of Indians into tribal entities, determination of reservation boundaries to clarify titles, and the fishing rights of Indians in the Great Lakes.

8. Material related to Indians appears in "Letters Received from the Department of the Platte, 1868-1903." This series is part of the records of what is now the Chicago District Office, Army Corps of Engineers. Reports concerning Indians were concentrated in the years 1868 to 1890. Examples include Captain Alexander Moore, "Journals of the Scouting Party from Ft. Bayard, N.M., under command of Capt. Alexander Moore, January 1 - 16, 1868," and J. G. Bourke, "A Rough Sketch of the Scene of Action on Powder River, March 17, 1876," both in the above-mentioned series. A National Archives micropublication with related records is M66, "Letters Sent by the Topographical Bureau of the War Department and by Successor Divisions in the Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1829-1870."

## SOURCES CONSULTED

### Textual Records

RG 21 - Records of the District Courts of the United States.

RG 75 - Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

RG 77 - Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers.

RG 118 - Records of the United States Attorneys and Marshals.

### Publications

Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Great Lakes Agency." Ashland, WI, 1971.

Keshena, Joseph. "The Menominee Indians of Wisconsin: Their History and Economic Development." Neopit, WI, 1948.

National Archives and Records Service. "Indian Census Rolls, 1888-1940." M595.

National Archives and Records Service. "Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affaris, 1824-1881." M234.

National Archives and Records Service. "Letters Sent by the Indian Division, 1849-1903." M606.

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National Archives and Records Service. "Letters Sent by the Topographical Bureau of the War Department and by Successor Divisions in the Office of the Chief of Engineers, 1829-1870." M66.

National Archives and Records Service. "Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-1851." M1.

National Archives and Records Service. "Records of the Office of Indian Affairs: Registers of Letters Received, 1824-1881." M18.

National Archives and Records Service. "Report Books of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1838-1885." M348.

National Archives and Records Service. "Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904." M574.

National Archives and Records Service. "State Department Territorial Papers: Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1801." M470.

National Archives and Records Service. "The Territorial Papers of the United States: The Territory of Wisconsin, 1836-1848, a microfilm supplement." M236.